

**Task Force on International Trade Statistics, Rome, 16-18 April 2002**  
**Summary of the Meeting**

The meeting was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and chaired by WTO. Mr. E. Gillin, Chief, Basic Data Branch, Statistics Division, welcomed the members of the Task Force. The full list of participants is shown in Annex 1. Annex 2 lists available documents. Annex 3 summarises the actions decided and Annex 4 includes the Provisional Agenda for the next meeting.

**1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**

The following suggestions were accepted: To discuss items 6(b) and 6(c) together with item 4(a) of the Provisional Agenda, and also to discuss items 4 (k) and 4 (l) together.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held in Beirut, 27-29 March 2001**

The minutes were accepted as circulated. The participants welcomed the new structure of the minutes. The summary of agreed actions was considered particularly useful.

**3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade**

The OECD reported on the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Trade Statistics meeting held in Paris from 5-7 December 2001. Last year's major developments there could be best summarised as "enhancing data quality and timeliness". In this respect, the OECD highlighted the importance of metadata and suggested that the Task Force also tackles this issue. The participants proposed to start with identifying what metadata should accompany particular pieces or sets of trade statistics taking into account information that already exists such as the UN web-site on the countries' compilation practices in merchandise trade.

The organizations were asked to post their metadata practices to the EDG. The OECD agreed to be the first to do this and to develop terms of reference for further work of the Task Force on metadata descriptors for merchandise trade statistics.

The OECD also reported that the joint OECD/UNSD/WTO statement on the importance of the countries' timely submissions to Comtrade had resulted in much earlier submissions of major traders in the course of this year.

The OECD's work plan for this year includes a project on trade indicators. A Task Force, composed of international organisations and country experts, will develop the project. It will be facilitated through an electronic discussion forum. Stocktaking exercises will consider merchandise trade, BOP goods and services and FDI statistics before selecting relevant indicators.

The next OECD ITS meeting has been tentatively scheduled for the week 10 - 14 February 2003 back-to-back with the Trade in Services meeting, with a half day overlapping session to allow for the discussion of cross-cutting issues.

The UNSD reported that International Merchandise Trade is on the Statistical Commission's agenda for 2003. The ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities has been disbanded but a new coordinating body is expected to be established in September 2002, probably under a different name.

#### **4. Data collection and dissemination**

##### **A. Concepts and Definitions**

###### **4(a), 6(b) and 6(c) The Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade, treatment of e-commerce in international trade statistics and alternative trade data sources.**

The UNSD reported that the Compiler's Manual had been finished and posted to the EDG. It will be published in the course of this year. The UNSD plans to organise regional Seminars to accompany the issuing of the Manual. These Seminars are foreseen for the African region (2) and for the countries in Eastern Europe and the CIS (1) in 2002 and other areas subsequently. Budgetary means for these Seminars are available. Members of the Task Force are invited to participate in these Seminars at their own expense.

E-commerce transactions that lead to a physical movement of goods over the border are included in the Compiler's Manual. However, the treatment of digitised products is outside of the Manual's scope. The question is whether these products are considered goods, services or a new category. In this respect, it would be of interest to collect the countries' practices. It was suggested that the next OECD meeting on International Trade Statistics could take up this issue in an overlapping session with the OECD's Trade in Services meeting. The EDG category on e-commerce should be renamed "Treatment of digitised products".

The Compiler's Manual includes a chapter on the use of alternative trade data sources to collect trade statistics. The UNSD envisages starting work on collecting country studies and other materials with the aim of publishing a supplement to the Compiler's Manual in 2004 which will also deal with issues not fully treated in the Manual (see Introduction to the Compiler's Manual). Meanwhile, some relevant country experiences presented at the recent OECD meeting could be added to the EDG. UNSD will review them and contact OECD for approval of placing them on the EDG. All members of the Task Force were requested to place any relevant material they came across to the EDG. It was decided to drop the item of alternative trade data sources from the agenda for the next meeting.

Overall, the Compiler's Manual was considered a very useful output. EUROSTAT plans to develop a corresponding handbook for its EU concepts and definitions that will become available as a hyperlink version on Internet.

#### **4(b) Statistical Territories of the World for Use in International Merchandise Trade Statistics**

The UNSD reported that the publication had been issued and UNSD had updated the electronic version of the statistical territories database on the EDG in April 2002. The IMF has not yet made an official decision to adopt the UN geo-nomenclature but is expected to align its nomenclature with the possibility of keeping some geographical breakdowns as memoranda items. It was agreed to add to the publication customs unions that publish aggregate trade data. The WTO agreed to post to the EDG a list of notified customs unions and regional trade agreements.

#### **4(c) Data Quality Assessment**

EUROSTAT presented its framework for assessing data quality. The structure of quality reports is harmonised for all statistical domains at the 1-digit level. The framework is also used by the EU member states. The next step will be to introduce in the Community legislation a reference to data quality.

The IMF has developed a first draft on its data quality framework for merchandise trade statistics (at the 3-digit level) and sought comments on the usefulness of such a framework. The IMF uses these frameworks to assess national statistical systems.

It was mentioned that both organisations should try to link their respective frameworks. The participants also raised the question as to whether these frameworks could be usefully applied to Technical Assistance activities and also to trigger these activities. Finally, these frameworks could also be helpful in approaches to structure statistical metadata.

### **B. Classifications**

#### **4(d) HS revision**

The WCO had reported that 60 countries had implemented HS02. For the next revision in 2007 which had already started, chapters 84, 85 and 90, i.e. the high technology area will be revised in detail. The problem in this area is the rapid convergence of the technology with which HS revisions cannot keep up. Discussions of these chapters are also influenced by WTO's Information Technology Agreement (ITA) which accords duty-free status to imports of products falling within its scope. However, although the HS2007 revision has started, the future of the HS after the next revision in 2007 will have to be explored further, for example, at regional level to accommodate more easily rapid changes in product characteristics. EUROSTAT suggested more frequent revisions like it does for the Combined Nomenclature (annual revisions).

The Members of the Task Force noted that the accumulative revisions in the HS after 2007 may call for a 4<sup>th</sup> revision of SITC.

For countries that adopt HS02 during the course of the year and submit mixed data to Comtrade, UNSD will convert them back to HS96.

**4(e) Correlations between HS/SITC/ISIC**

The UNSD reported that it will issue its publication containing correlation tables of HS02/SITC Rev.3 in hard copy, on the UNSD web-site and on CD-ROM. It also has produced correlation tables for HS96 and HS02 to BEC and a revised correlation of SITC, Rev.3 to BEC. Furthermore, correlation tables between HS02 and ISIC Rev. 3.1, CPC Version 1.1 and SITC, Rev.3 are available at the UN. The UNSD also reported that in respect of split codes for the CN96/SITC Rev.3 and the HS02/SITC Rev.3 correlation only two codes were found where the two organizations disagree, however, these differences are of a principle nature and based on value of trade in EU compared to value of trade at world level. The UNSD had also prepared database versions of HS02/HS96 and HS96/HS02 correlations using WCO correlations in text format (Word). The Task Force also asked whether WCO could provide future correlation tables in database format. The WCO will investigate this.

With the increased linkages of business and trade, the ISIC classification becomes more prominent and UNSD will post a document on ongoing work for this classification to the EDG.

**4(f) Simplification of data elements in Customs procedures**

The WCO prepared a complete list of the simplified data elements and also a list of the data elements WCO thinks are important to statistics. International organizations welcomed this input and agreed to check with their offices the possible impact of these data elements on statistical information. Results should be posted to the EDG until end of June and WTO agreed to summarise them for further study.

**C. Methodology****4(g) Improving the estimation of aggregate exports and imports**

The UNSD suggested a procedure that would allow the replacement of UNSD's annual estimates by WTO estimates. Such a collaboration should help to improve data quality and consistency. While UNSD and WTO would start off such a cooperation, other organizations could join in once satisfactory working procedures are in place. Other organisations expressing their interest were UN/ECLAC, UNCTAD and the FAO. For ease of reference, it was suggested to regroup all documents on estimation methodologies of previous meetings under a separate category on the EDG.

**4(h) Estimation of the world export matrix by commodity groups and regions**

EUROSTAT presented a feasibility study for producing reconciled world trade networks and asked the Task Force for comments. The participants stated that their respective programmes were not completely described in this paper and that their approaches to develop matrices would differ. For example, the UNSD uses a bottom-up approach whereas the WTO uses a top-down approach. Other issues to be taken into account would be asymmetry problems, for example, for Intrastat. The participants felt that a reconciled export and import network would not to be feasible for the time being.

**4(i) and 4(j) Technical information on index numbers of international trade and price and volume indices**

The UNSD reported that it had continued collecting information on national practices in compilation and dissemination of index numbers for merchandise trade. Currently, UNSD is finalising the draft report and it will be posted to the EDG for comments.

EUROSTAT reported that it is rebasing its foreign trade indices to the year 2000. It has also developed a new application that allows calculating unit-values for any combination of reporters, partners and commodities. EUROSTAT has also created a specific Task Force on import price methodology. UNCTAD is going to relaunch its study to estimate unit-values for major developing countries' trade in manufactures.

The Task Force also raised the issue of a Manual on Foreign Trade Indices. The IMF reported that the Ottawa Group dealing with consumer price indices would not work on foreign trade indices. The need to develop such a Manual through an inter-agency effort was however clearly felt and the question was raised whether the IMF would be ready to lead such a common endeavour. The IMF representative agreed to explore this possibility with his office and report back to the next Task Force. To accelerate work, participants agreed that it would be useful to have an annotated list of contents available for the next meeting on which basis work could eventually be shared. The work of UNCTAD and EUROSTAT could constitute important inputs for the Manual.

**D. Databases on international trade**

UN/ECLAC, UN/ESCWA and UN/ECA reported on their respective international databases and other activities in the field of merchandise trade statistics.

UN/ESCWA organised a Regional Seminar on international recommendations for concepts and definitions in the merchandise trade area in 2001 to raise awareness in its member countries on the importance of implementing these standards. One major problem is that these countries still exclude petroleum statistics from their official trade flows. The Task Force asked UN/ESCWA to develop a concrete large-scale technical assistance project and offered to comment on the proposal. Endorsement of this project by the Task Force would be of support in receiving the necessary means from funding organizations.

UN/ECLAC described its statistical databases and highlighted that for Latin American countries often customs-based trade flows considerably differ from Balance-of-Payments flows due to, for example, poor data capture on the part of customs and methodological differences between merchandise and BOP statistics.

UN/ECA reported on its recent re-organization of the statistical service away from a centralized to a decentralized service.

The FAO presented its newly developed trade information system. In downsizing the old mainframe system, reference files were revised and enhanced. New standardization and validation procedures were introduced. The average time of processing for a country could considerably be reduced. The Task Force suggested

to add to the system agricultural definitions of other international organizations. This would multiply the usage of the system.

#### **4(k) and 4(l) Status of COMTRADE and EDP strategies and technical issues of Comtrade**

The UNSD reported that the Comtrade country coverage once again improved throughout 2001. However, countries do not maintain their reporting schedules from year to year. The UNSD has therefore to continue its efforts to maintain and improve the country coverage.

The UNSD reported that the discussions between the World Bank and UNSD on developing a joint Internet-based interface to Comtrade had been discontinued by UNSD. The UNSD will continue to develop its own client/server application for Comtrade. The retrieval part of this system is expected to be opened up to Task Force participants for testing during the third quarter of 2002. One of the features that the developers of the system are trying to accommodate in the new system is the possibility of downloading large data sets through Internet. A new version of Comtrade for Windows will also be available in the second quarter of 2002.

The UNSD also reported that in the client/server system conversions between classifications will be done directly through linking each classification to the originally received classification. An analysis of the impact of this methodological change will be made available on the EDG. Also, consideration is being given to regrouping bilateral trade flows below US\$501 as "areas not elsewhere specified". It was pointed out that this change could impact on trade of very small countries or least-developed countries, and also can have an impact when mirror statistics are used. The UNSD agreed to study the implications and report on them.

### **5. Exchange of data and information amongst international organizations**

#### **Data exchange**

##### **5(a) Aggregate trade data**

The UNSD continued to source its aggregate exports and imports for 140 countries from data reported to the IMF in national currencies. UNSD has now also modified its software to be able to take directly the country figures in dollar terms from IMF. However, it now appears that some of the IMF reported figures may actually refer to BOP data instead of customs figures. Also, reconciliation with totals reported to Comtrade needs continuous efforts. Work with the IMF will continue. The Task Force members reiterated that publishing of aggregate trade figures in national currencies would be useful to analyse the dollar effect on trade flows.

##### **5(b) The EU in international trade statistics**

EUROSTAT reported that it had started its delivery of detailed trade statistics to the Comtrade database and that it will continue to send these data twice a year, i.e. in May and September. Normally, trade data become available 50 days after the reference period and are published through a press release which may however

include estimations. The OECD said it will start quarterly press releases for which it will use EUROSTAT's quarterly data. The UNSD now includes EUROSTAT-sourced aggregate data as memoranda items in its monthly publication (MBS) and detailed data in a Comtrade-like file at the ICC mainframe. WTO reported that it had further analysed EUROSTAT's trade data and that it had replaced its nationally-based series at total merchandise level with EUROSTAT data. With respect to EUROSTAT's detailed trade statistics and the trade indices, the WTO stated that further bilateral discussions were required in order to complete its assessment of the possibility of replacing its present series with EUROSTAT's data.

#### **5(c) Exchange of detailed trade data between OECD and UNSD**

Both OECD and UNSD reported that their data sharing agreement was working well. It has been implemented for all OECD countries except seven (Mexico, UK, US, Greece, Denmark, Austria, and Australia). The ultimate goal would be to agree on a joint processing in order to publish the "same numbers". The late submission by countries is followed up through joint reminders.

#### **Information exchange**

#### **5(d) Internet site with aggregate exports and imports by country**

The WTO presented a project specification for setting up a joint data set of international organisations at total merchandise level. All organisations welcomed this initiative which could help improve data quality. Such a data set, disseminated through Internet, could also help to encourage countries improving their reporting practices. It was highlighted that a common data set, developed on an incremental basis, would be a difficult and challenging task. Some of the questions concern the conversion factors, the relationship between the common data set and each organization's data, the different production schedules of organizations, the extent to which data are adjusted, and each organization's responsibilities in data collection. The site should include a description of each organization's work on trade statistics and links to the organizations web sites.

It was agreed, that the WTO would finalise its project specification by the end of May and coordinate the inter-agency effort in creating this common data set.

#### **5(e) EDG - International Trade Statistics**

The OECD reported that it would start redesigning its current EDGs using new technology and it will keep TF Members up-to-date of new developments. The system's revamp might help to resolve some of the existing problems such as the random working of the automatic notification procedure. The participants asked whether OECD could also investigate the possibility of allowing posting of a new message to two categories in one submission and OECD agreed to investigate this. All authors of meetings documents agreed to resubmit their documents to a "topic" on the EDG in addition to the listing under meetings.

## **6. Globalisation**

### **6(a) Status of the globalisation projects**

EUROSTAT reported on its Task Force on "Trade registers and Globalisation". In this context, several EU members tested different methodologies to collect data on intra-firm trade. The next steps will be to compare the results of these varying methodologies and to develop a legal framework for the data collection.

### **6(b) Treatment of e-commerce in international trade statistics and 6(c) Alternative trade data sources**

see 4(a).

### **6(d) Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade**

The most important discrepancy between external trade statistics and Balance-of-payments and National Accounts is the different valuations of imports. EUROSTAT plans to produce in the future a fob/fob balance for the extra-EU trade. A questionnaire sent to EU Members in 2000 helped to assess the current situation as to whether countries do compile cif/fob conversions and which methodologies they apply. The aim would be to introduce in the long term a standardised methodology in all EU Member States.

## **7. Technical assistance**

The international organizations reported on their various activities. The UNSD plans to hold three workshops on the Compiler's Guide, EUROSTAT runs horizontal projects (SNA, external trade) in addition to regional projects, for example, for CIS countries, Mediterranean countries, ACP countries, etc. There is also a specific country programme for China. The new version of Eurotrace should be available by January 2003. A Seminar will be held at the end of this year to present the new product. IMF has no specific projects on merchandise trade statistics, however, through its data quality frameworks, it is assessing the countries' current systems. Following the Doha declaration, WTO's priority objective is to help build capacity for trade negotiations. In the tariffs area, there are some 20 activities planned.

It was mentioned that it would be of utmost importance to ensure coherence amongst the agencies' technical assistance activities. This requires forward planning. EUROSTAT invited all organizations to the forthcoming Luxembourg Forum on TA activities and it was also decided to create a TA category on the EDG so that agencies' can post their planned activities as a step towards ascertaining the feasibility of joint activities.

## **Other business**

Issues discussed here included EUROSTAT's initiative regarding tariffs databases, the use of administrative data to collect trade statistics (data mining) and the treatment of digitised products. WTO invited EUROSTAT to attend a Tariff Seminar end of May at the WTO premises. It was reported that the ISWGSNA will look into

the issue of digitised products and the Canberra Group at the statistical treatment of mobile phones. The OECD reported on a working paper on software prepared for the forthcoming meeting on National Accounts. WCO said that it is going to prepare a document on its e-commerce strategy for the next Council in June. It was decided to rename item 6 "Cross-cutting issues".

#### **8(a) Time and place of next meeting**

UN/ECA kindly offered to hold the next Task Force meeting at its premises in Addis Ababa. The date will be fixed either for the week starting 24 March or 31 March 2003 depending on ECA's statistical sub-committee meeting that will take place within the annual ECA conference.

#### **8(b) Future work of the Task force**

It was suggested that the Task Force's report to the Statistical Commission in 2003 should highlight major achievements and a prioritised list of future activities. The Statistical Commission could then accept or amend these priorities. Proposed future activities mentioned were the common data set as a major item for good inter-agency cooperation, the possible metadata project and the Manual on Trade Indices. The IMF offered to prepare an initial outline for the Manual before the next Statistical Commission which could be added to the Task Force's report together with a possible time-frame and division of labour.

The Task Force thanked the FAO for hosting the meeting at its premises.

## Annex 1: List of participants

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## Annex 2: List of available papers

- 3<sup>rd</sup> International Trade Statistics meeting – OECD – detailed draft Minutes
- International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compiler's Manual – a progress report by UNSD
- Statistical territories of the world for use in ITS – a progress report by UNSD
- Data Quality Assessment - update by EUROSTAT
- Data Quality Assessment Framework for International Trade Statistics ( IMF)
- HS revision -- update by WCO
- Correlation tables between the HS02 and HS96 -- report by UNSD
- Correlation tables between the HS02 and SITC, Rev.3 -- report by UNSD
- WCO Data Set version 1.0 (general data elements)
- WCO Data Set version 1.0 (Statistics-related data elements)
- Improving the estimation of aggregate exports and imports -- update by UNSD
- World Trade Matrix – A feasibility Study – Contribution by EUROSTAT
- Technical information on index numbers of international trade -- progress report by UNSD
- Price and volume indices -- update by EUROSTAT
- Description of the Data Base on Trade in Latin America and the Caribbean: BADECEL – report by UN/ECLAC
- Status of International Trade statistics in the ESCWA region – report by UN/ESCWA
- Comtrade, Status, Plans, User needs – report by UNSD 21-02-2002
- UNSD/IMF cooperation in data exchange and reconciliation – update by UNSD
- The EU in international trade statistics -- update by EUROSTAT
- The EU in international trade statistics -- conference room paper by WTO
- Internet site with aggregate exports and imports by country -- update by UNSD

- Internet site with aggregate exports and imports by country -- contribution by WTO
- Status of the globalisation projects -- update by EUROSTAT
- Manuals on Goods External Trade and International trade on Services – a common chapter – Contribution by EUROSTAT
- Cif/fob adjustment at EU level -Contribution by EUROSTAT –27-03-02
- Presentation of a study recently launched by EUROSTAT on the Tariff statistics – Contribution by EUROSTAT
- Adoption of the Extrastat system to better meet user requirements: use of the SAD within the EU - Contribution by EUROSTAT
- OECD: Computers Software: International Trade Flows

### **Annex 3: Summary of actions decided**

Action	Who
1) To post metadata practices to the EDG	All
2) To draft terms of reference for a possible TF project on metadata	OECD
3) Rename e-commerce to trade in digitised products on EDG	WTO
4) Post material for supplement to Compiler's Manual to the EDG	All
5) Review OECD meeting documents for the EDG entry on supplement to the Compiler's Manual	UNSD/OECD
6) Add list of customs unions and RTAs to EDG	WTO
7) Offer comments on IMF's Data Quality Assessment Framework	All
8) Post report on May HS Council meeting on EDG	WCO
9) Investigate preparing future HS correlations in database format	WCO
10) To post ISIC ongoing work summary on EDG	UNSD
11) To analyse WCO's simplified list of data elements relevant to statistics by end of June and post results to EDG. WTO to summarise findings.	All WTO
12) To regroup all documents on estimation under one category on EDG	WTO
13) To post draft report on Technical Index Numbers to EDG	UNSD
14) To explore feasibility of leading an inter-agency effort to develop a Manual on Foreign Trade Indices – prepare an annotated outline	IMF
15) To present analysis on trade flows lower than US\$501	UNSD
16) Add EU15 to Comtrade in HS96	UNSD
17) Action plan for TA in ESCWA region	ESCWA
18) Review dollar aggregate figures	UNSD/IMF
19) Comtrade/IMF totals comparisons	UNSD/IMF
20) Analyse further EU methodology for producing detailed trade statistics (product residuals) and trade indices (consistency)	WTO/ EUROSTAT
21) Final project specification on CDS	WTO
22) Write descriptions of agencies' trade work and website addresses	All
23) All authors of meeting documents to resubmit them to the EDG under a topic in addition to the meeting	All
24) To post planned Technical Assistance activities on EDG	All

**Annex 4:****TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS***Addis Ababa, March 2003***Provisional Agenda**

- 1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held in Rome, 16-18 April 2002**
- 3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade**
  - (a) Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> ITS meeting of OECD
  - (b) Report of the 34<sup>th</sup> UN Statistical Commission
  - (c) Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities

**4. Data collection and dissemination****A. Concepts and Definitions**

- (a) the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade (*update by UNSD*)
- (b) the Statistical Territories of the World for Use in International Merchandise Trade Statistics (*update by UNSD*)
- (c) Data Quality Assessment (*update by the IMF*)

**B. Classifications**

- (d) HS revision (*update by WCO*)
- (e) simplification of data elements in Customs procedures (*update by WCO*)

**C. Methodology**

- (f) improving the estimation of aggregate exports and imports (*update by UNSD*)
- (g) Index numbers of international trade (*update by UNSD and IMF*)

**D. Databases on international trade**

- (h) COMTRADE: status, technical issues and EDP strategies (*update by UNSD*)
- (i) Statistical metadata in merchandise trade (*report by OECD*)

**5. Exchange of data and information amongst international organizations**

- (a) aggregate trade data (*update by UNSD and IMF*)
- (b) the EU in international trade statistics (*report by EUROSTAT*)
- (c) exchange of detailed trade data between OECD and UNSD (*joint update*)
- (d) Internet site with aggregate exports and imports by country (*update by WTO*)
- (e) EDG - International Trade Statistics

**6. Cross-cutting issues**

- (a) status of the globalisation projects (*update by EUROSTAT and OECD*)
- (b) treatment of digitised products (*exchange of views and information*)
- (c) interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade (*update by EUROSTAT*)
- (d) the OECD's Trade Indicators Project (*update by OECD*)

**7. Technical assistance** (*updates by various international organizations*)

**8. Other business**

- (a) time and place of next meeting